

The Open Mike^{District 2}

A Newsletter From Councilman **Mike Knapp**

Volume 1, Number 7

October 2005

Keep Agriculture Thriving in the Ag Reserve *It's Time to Rethink Our PIF Policies*

**Mike Knapp**

The Open Mike meetings I've hosted during September – and yes, there are more on the way in October – have been incredibly informative, useful and a whole lot of fun. I always enjoy face to face discussions, and the meetings we've had so far have been impassioned, sincere, and sometimes heated, but always honest and open. And I appreciate that.

One of the major topics of discussion at these meetings has been the Agricultural Reserve, and what is being done to ensure the reserve is managed in a manner consistent with what was intended when it was created in 1980. I'm not at all surprised we in the Upcounty are having such heartfelt discussions about the reserve – the vast majority of its 93,000 acres lies within our part of the county. It's our own backyard, and we feel very strongly about the need to be responsible stewards.

The biggest issue of concern regarding the reserve has been policies related to Private Institutional Facilities (PIFs). As defined in current law, PIFs are buildings constructed by non-profit organizations; generally, these are churches, private schools, senior housing or daycare centers. Under statute, PIFs have generally been allowed greater flexibility for development in the Ag Reserve, with the underlying assumption that they are, by nature, beneficial to the general needs of the surrounding communities and have less of an impact on the land than would a residential or commercial development.

Those were the initial assumptions; the question now, as we contemplate applications for larger PIF developments in the Ag Reserve, is whether our existing PIF policies are truly consistent with the inherent character and policies of the Ag Reserve. I am keenly aware of the importance of PIFs – especially faith-based organizations – in our communities and in our daily lives; I am equally aware of the critical need to maintain the integrity of Ag Reserve. Therefore, I feel a great responsibility to seek ways to strengthen agricultural policies that will enable the preservation of this great resource, while identifying new ways to provide our PIFs the ability to grow within the communities they serve.

The Council has been working to strike this delicate balance as well, and you may be aware that we established a task force to explore a number of alternatives to our County's existing PIF policy. The task force identified a number of recommendations that could limit the size of PIFs in

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Reserve *continued from page 1*

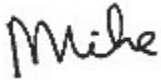
agricultural zones, including setting a limit of 15% on impervious surfaces, which is a surface that water can't pass through, like a building, parking lot, or even some sports fields. I appreciate the efforts of the task force, but I've got to say I have some real concerns with the recommendations, namely because I don't believe they have an adequate agricultural perspective.

When the Ag Reserve was created, it was intended that its first purpose would be to ensure the viability of farming. After that, if farming was not to be a primary use, it was intended to maintain open space in our county that could be used and enjoyed by all residents. That's why I have some concerns about the recommendations of the PIF task force – if, for example, we were to impose a 15% impervious surface limitation, it might force PIFs to acquire even more acreage for their facility, which would ultimately make more land unavailable for agriculture. I continue to believe the first use for land in the Ag Reserve is agriculture; we need to ensure, then, that land remains available for that purpose.

Given this, it is critical that we identify policies that will allow PIFs – especially houses of worship – to continue to grow in a way that meets the needs of their communities. That means that we need to encourage development along major transportation corridors, and ensure that the size of any new PIFs are consistent with the size and scale of the surrounding community. The County has a number of zoning policies and other incentives that it uses to encourage the construction of housing and certain types of commercial development – such as biotechnology – and I believe we must develop similar policies to allow our PIFs and developers to work together to address needs of these growing organizations in the communities they serve.

There are countless challenges facing the agricultural and faith-based communities in our county, but I continue to believe there are ways for us to implement policies that will allow each to flourish for generations to come.

As always, thanks for taking the time to read my newsletter. It's my pleasure to serve.



Mike Knapp
Councilmember

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Knapp Sponsors Forum on Gang Awareness and Prevention

Over the past six or eight weeks, I know we've all read with concern a number of reports on what appears to be gang-related violence at schools and school-related functions in and around the Upcounty area. Gangs is a tough topic, because it goes beyond being merely a school, law enforcement, or government issue. It's an issue that all of us must work to address together, at all levels of government, at all levels of communities, and across organizations, jurisdictions and geographic lines. For that reason, I'm cosponsoring a community forum -- with the invaluable help of the [Montgomery Village Foundation](#), the [Montgomery County Police Department](#), and the [Watkins Mill Cluster Schools](#) -- to talk about this problem, identify possible solutions, and see what can be done working together. I hope to see you there.

WHERE	The O'Shea Theatre at Watkin's Mill High School 10302 Apple Ridge Road Gaithersburg, MD
WHEN	Wednesday, October 5 7:00 p.m.
SPONSORS	Councilmember Mike Knapp The Montgomery Village Foundation Montgomery County Police Department The Watkins Mill Cluster Schools

This community forum will replace the Open Mike meeting that was to be held in Montgomery Village on the same evening. However, I plan on sticking around afterward to talk about other issues you may want to discuss.

Lessons from Katrina and Rita: **Be Ready. Make a Plan.**

Montgomery County has deployed firefighters, search and rescue workers, and other volunteers to the Gulf Region to help in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We're fortunate to have such well-trained professionals and volunteers in our county to protect and assist us and, when called on, to protect and assist others around the country. However, after watching the federal, state and local response during and after the hurricanes, it has become clear that governments and individuals alike need to be even better prepared.

While the chances of such a catastrophic hurricane striking our area are remote, we do have to deal with snow and ice storms and, with our proximity to Washington, DC, we should always be mindful of the threat of terrorism. As Chairman of the Council's Homeland Security Committee, one of my responsibilities is to see to it that our county is adequately prepared for the worst -- and part of that job involves making sure that our citizens are prepared, too.

In the event of a disaster -- especially one that cuts power and phone service -- could you be self-sufficient for three days while awaiting help? Have you put aside any basic supplies? Have you

taken into account the needs of anyone with special needs in your home, or the needs of your pet? If you have, you're way ahead of many of your fellow citizens; if you haven't, you're not alone -- and there are plenty of resources out there to help you.

Visit the [Montgomery County Department of Homeland Security's website](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/csltmlpl.asp?url=/content/council/ccmbrs/knapp/newsletter/) for more information on planning for disaster, including checklists of items you might want to store in a safe place. Lots of other good information -- including protocol for dealing with an emergency on Metro -- is also available from <http://www.makeaplan.org/>.

Look out for yourself and your loved ones. Make a plan. Please. Thanks.

Knapp Criticizes Verizon For Poor Service, Bad Planning

Calls on Verizon to Cease Work Activity Until Issues Addressed

At the Tuesday, September 20, 2005, Council session, Councilmember Knapp delivered the following statement regarding the continuing problems county residents are encountering with Verizon.

Many of you may have seen in the newspaper one in what seems like a continuing series of articles about Verizon and its efforts to expand its cable and wiring capacity in Montgomery County. They began this expansion about a year ago, but my office was first made aware of it when work in Olney Mill resulted in yards being torn up and cable and wiring being left strewn about in the yards and driveways of county residents.



My office attempted to serve as an intermediary to put people in touch with Verizon in the hope they could get these issues addressed promptly. But when problems continued to compound, Mrs. Praisner called Verizon before the MFP committee this past February. At that time, I believe we had five different executives representing different functions of the organization who explained to us that they were undertaking a massive project and were trying to move very quickly. They then assured us that they recognized they had probably tried to move a little too quickly and, consequently, didn't have the proper policies and procedures in place for them to really undertake their project in an effective manner. As a result, their ability to be responsive to the problems they had caused in Olney and other parts of the county weren't being adequately addressed.

Nonetheless, Verizon assured us that they were going to implement training programs for various subcontractors that were working for them, and that they had escalation procedures in place to remedy any problems that might arise. We all went away believing that the problems had been properly identified and expecting Verizon to address those problems with some sort of coherent plan to move things along.

It probably goes without saying that we were to be disappointed in our expectations. Throughout the Spring and Summer, all of the same problems that arose in Olney continued throughout the Upcounty, especially in Germantown, where cable was strewn about, yards were torn apart, driveways were torn up, and people regularly lost power and cable, sometimes for extended

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periods of time. And still the phone calls to my office continued. Frankly, I'm not sure a day still passes where we don't get one, sometimes many complaints.

In July, Verizon again appeared before the MFP committee for a follow-up hearing. I submitted a memo to the committee at that time because Verizon had recently performed some work in my own Germantown neighborhood and had cut both cable and power to my home and many others for more than a day. Verizon claimed that they had followed their own procedures and had twice notified the neighborhood that they would be working in the community. I pointed out that such notification hadn't happened in our neighborhood – no one was notified even once, much less twice, that Verizon would be working. And according to countless residents in Olney, Germantown, and other Upcounty neighborhoods, no one was notifying them, either. Still, Verizon insisted that escalation procedures were being followed, and through my office we continued to try to follow those procedures, but with little resolution. And now, last evening, I was notified that more than a thousand Germantown residents had lost their cable because Verizon's subcontractor had cut through their cable lines. Suffice it to say, this continues to be a source of significant frustration.

I understand from counsel that there is little that we can do from a county perspective that relates to the utility lines; it is an issue regulated by the state, though apparently somewhat lackadaisically. But I wanted to take this opportunity to make my colleagues aware of this ongoing problem. I frankly wasn't sure of the scale or magnitude to which people are aware of this -- but it is happening without fail each and every day.

I was especially intrigued because I had asked one of the Verizon's officials in February if the company could give us a sense of where their subcontractors were going to be working and when they planned to be there so we could work with them to reach out to those communities and let residents know what was going on. The response I got was, "We can't tell you that because that's proprietary information." Well, I can tell you that I really don't need to ask where Verizon it might be working on any given day; I can always tell where they're working because I get countless phone calls from that community complaining about power and cable outages.

Verizon should cease all its activities within the county until they have come up with a way to effectively communicate with the community and with their potential customers...

I'm a strong proponent of business, and I believe that we need competition in the cable and phone industry. But I am completely dismayed by the customer service Verizon is providing – or not providing – at this point. Having run a customer service operation for a private business, I know that when you are undertaking a massive project that has to be done quickly, you need to have a system in place to work with the community. That way, if there are going to be problems – and there are almost always problems of some sort – then you can make sure you can remedy them quickly.

But that doesn't appear to have happened here. In fact, I have some constituents who have had their driveways torn apart, and when they've approached the subcontractor about having the driveway fixed or replaced, they've had to argue the obvious. And if the driveway is fixed, it is

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often fixed poorly. Others have had their driveways blocked by the refuse the subcontractor has left behind from repairing the driveway. The issues go on and on.

I'm frustrated. I am calling on Verizon to step up and recognize that it shares some responsibility for these ongoing problems. It was with some bemusement that I read in the newspaper that Verizon was still rather lamely asserting that the problem didn't really lie with them, but rather with allegedly mislabeled utility lines. According to Verizon, it was someone else's fault. Now, come on. If there is one thing that's clear in all this, it's that Verizon's out there doing this work, cutting those lines, tearing up those lawns, and chewing up driveways. Incredibly, though, Verizon continues to shift responsibility. Now they say it's the fault of the subcontractors. The last time I checked, those subcontractors were still working for Verizon. It's really difficult to escape from the discussion at that point.

If Verizon wants to approach the county for a franchise agreement, it's critical they be mindful of their responsibilities as neighbors. I would say they need to improve customer service, but at the moment, it doesn't even appear there's any customer service in place to improve. And that's appalling. Verizon should cease all its activities within the county until they have come up with a way to effectively communicate with the community and with their potential customers – although at this point, I'm not convinced anyone in the county who has encountered Verizon would choose them to provide service – and inform residents how they are going to remedy these problems, and when.

I also call upon our state delegation to look into this so the council might have a better understanding of the mechanisms that are available to control or monitor such activities. Verizon certainly has the right to work within the right of way, I understand, but it also has an obligation to work responsibly. Instead, each day we have hundreds and sometimes thousands of residents who are without power or cable or who are having yards dug up or ruined simply because the county does not have the appropriate procedures in place to prevent this from happening, or to give residents appropriate recourse. It needs to stop, and it needs to stop soon.

I very much appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues in allowing me to discuss this. Despite what we've read in the newspaper, this problem is not going away any time soon.

Update: The Management & Fiscal Policy Committee will meet on Monday, October 24, at 2:00 for its quarterly review of Comcast, RCN, and Verizon Customer Service policies and practices.

Germantown Economic Development Strategy Paper Available for Review, Comment

Anyone who cares about ensuring a first-rate commercial district blossoms in Germantown will want to check out the newly-completed [Germantown Economic Development Strategy working paper](#).

This document, released by the [Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce](#) (GGCC) on September 16, is intended to lay the groundwork for the future growth of Germantown by setting forth a vision, providing recommendations for investments, and stimulating discussion among the Germantown community. I worked with the GGCC to get this done, and I'm very impressed with the results. I encourage everyone to take a look at the Chamber's working paper -- it's only 32 pages long, and gracefully written -- and then let the Chamber know your thoughts.

As GGCC President Marilyn Balcombe said in her letter of transmission, "This document is intended to initiate discussion amongst the stakeholders of Germantown's future. The strategy calls upon three primary partners -- the Germantown business community, the Montgomery County government, and the residential community -- working together to impact Germantown's future." Even if you don't live in Germantown, you're a stakeholder. As a resident of the Upcounty community, chances are you've likely spent enough time in the Germantown area to have an opinion about commercial development in the area, and the kinds of shops, restaurants, and culture you'd like to see the community embrace. Take a look, and then take a moment to let the Chamber know your views.

For more information, visit the GGCC's website by at www.ggchamber.org.

Clarksburg Update

Lease Signed for Interim Fire Station

I'm pleased to announce that the County has signed the lease for the interim fire station to be located at Gateway Center Drive. As noted in the last issue of *The Open Mike*, putting the interim station here helps us avoid the need to first establish temporary services at a temporary facility, then move them to an interim site, then move them *again* once the permanent facility is completed. This way, we'll only have to move once. The complement of personnel and equipment -- the station will have an engine and a medic unit -- will meet the fire and rescue needs of the growing Clarksburg community. It is anticipated the new station will open no later than December, though there are efforts underway to get the station open sooner than that. Keep watching *The Open Mike* for more information. **See next page for schedules.**

Planning Board Scheduled Actions

The [Montgomery County Planning Board](#) is scheduled to hold three hearings regarding Clarksburg over the next two months. Hearings are held at the Montgomery County Planning Board's offices at the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, located at 8787 Georgia Avenue, in Silver Spring.

October 6: Violation hearing (Agenda available at the Commission's website.)

October 25: Violation hearing

November 3: Sanction hearing

County Council Scheduled Actions

The County Council's Committee on Planning, House and Economic Development (PHED) holds oversight sessions on development approval issues every two weeks. Additionally, the relevant committees of oversight continue to hold regular meetings for briefings on development in the area, and the full council is scheduled to receive the report from the Office of Legislative Oversight in November. Please [see the council schedule](#), below, for more information.

October 10: MFP Committee hearing on development in Clarksburg

October 17: PHED Committee biweekly session on development approval issues

October 27: T&E Committee briefing on the status of roads in Clarksburg

October 31: PHED Committee biweekly session on development approval issues

November 8: Full Council session on the receipt and release of the OLO study on the development approval process in Clarksburg Town Center

November 29: Full Council Public Hearing, public comments on the county planning process

SoccerPlex, Clubs Reach Agreement Allowing Games To Proceed

In late September, the [Maryland SoccerPlex](#) reached a temporary agreement with six regional soccer clubs that will allow games to resume at the SoccerPlex facility in Boyds. Without this interim agreement in place, the six soccer clubs -- [Montgomery Soccer Inc.](#), [Damascus Soccer Club](#), [Seneca Soccer Association](#), [Bethesda Soccer Club](#), [Potomac Soccer Association](#), and [Washington International Soccer League](#) -- could not play games at the SoccerPlex.

Councilman Steve Silverman and I worked with both sides to reach an agreement, and I am pleased with the action that has been taken so far. The good news, then, is that we've got one of the best facilities in the country and kids will be playing soccer on it. Now we've got to figure out how to make this agreement stick for the long term.

The deal that was struck also provides for continuing discussion of the relationship the clubs will have with Soccerplex and the SoccerPlex's business model. The agreement sets a November 15 deadline for the participants to make significant progress on resolving the outstanding issues of fees and facility governance. If major progress cannot be made by that time, the clubs will still have time to make alternate arrangements for games that will occur in Spring 2006.

I appreciate the good faith that both sides have exhibited so far. I am continuing to monitor discussions between the parties, and hope to have something positive to report in November. Keep watching the Open Mike for more information.

"Damascus Towers" Height Restriction Legislation Advances

On September 9, the full Council held a public hearing on my legislation, Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 05-10, to define many of the ambiguous terms used by the county to describe and regulate public utility buildings and structures, broadcast towers, and telecommunication facilities. I introduced this legislation to better clarify the height limitations for radio and television broadcast towers in response to concerns I had heard from residents of Damascus regarding the possible construction of towers of undefined height in the community.

My "Damascus Towers" legislation, as its come to be called, defines "radio and television broadcast stations and towers" -- a term which is only loosely defined under current law -- and establishes special exception standards to exceed certain heights, depending on the zone in which the tower is located. Damascus resident Pam Bussard provided valuable testimony at the hearing that will help us improve the bill as it moves forward, and I very much appreciate her guidance and leadership in this matter. My legislation will next be before the Management & Fiscal Policy Committee on October 17 at 2:00 p.m.

Celebrate the Ag Reserve at the Fall Festival in Butler's Orchard

Celebrate Rural Montgomery invites all county residents to the 2005 Fall Festival on **Saturday, October 8, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.** at [Butler's Orchard](#) in Germantown. The festival will feature free live bluegrass music, hayrides in the Butler's Orchard pumpkin patch, a bonfire, marshmallow roast, jumps in a hayloft, and many other activities. You'll also have the opportunity to hear from County leaders about how Montgomery established its innovative farmland preservation program in 1980, and how it continues to be a regional and national leader in the protection of family farms and rural open space.

The fall festival at Butler's Orchard on October 8th culminates a year-long celebration of the Ag Reserve's 25th anniversary. "Montgomery is the number one pumpkin growing county in Maryland and the pumpkin patch at Butler's Orchard is the perfect place to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our nationally acclaimed Agricultural Reserve," said Melanie Choukas-Bradley of Celebrate Rural Montgomery, one of the sponsoring organizations. "Our hope is that Montgomery County will continue to be a leader in farmland and rural open space preservation for many years to come," she said.

Admission and most of the events are free, but if you decide to bring your appetite, caramel apples, apple cider, hamburgers, hot dogs, and lots of other food will be on sale for a minimal cost.

Celebrate Rural Montgomery, is a nonprofit consortium of 67 civic groups, farm businesses and government agencies. The Fall Festival is also sponsored by the Montgomery Countryside Alliance, the [Montgomery County Department of Economic Development](#), and the [Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission](#).

[Butler's Orchard](#) is located at 22200 Davis Mill Road in Germantown.

Special thanks to [Andrea Arnold](#) and [Melanie Choukas-Bradley](#), staff at Celebrate Rural Montgomery, for providing the details for this announcement.

Davis Mill, Homestead to be Dedicated in Goshen on October 15

The newly-preserved John Davis Grist Mill will be dedicated on **Saturday, October 15, at 3:00 p.m.** in a ceremony to be held at the mill site in Goshen, near the intersection of Davis Mill Road and Huntmaster Road. (In the event of rain, a tent will be provided at the site.)



Davis Mill, circa 1900.

The site now known as Davis Mill was initially owned by John Greenbury Griffith in the 1780s. A 1783 tax assessment record indicates the property consisted of 384 acres with a dwelling, corn house, stable, barn and grist mill on a good stream of water. In 1794, the property was sold to Harry Dorsey and was passed down to relatives until it was sold to John Davis in 1885 for \$4,000.

Frank Ierardi planned the restoration of the mill site for several years. He and his group of volunteers have successfully restored two dry stone walls and uncovered a buried wall. They have also partially restored one section of the free standing wall. Volunteers were recruited from

the sponsoring organization, the [Goshen Mills Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution](#), and from members of the Greater Goshen Civic Association, the Greenway Trail Volunteers, the Goshen Historical Preservation Society, and other generous individuals throughout Montgomery County.

The Davis Mill site is located on the Seneca Creek in Goshen, near the intersections of Davis Mill Road and Huntmaster Road.

Local Writers Bring Goshen History to Life

The Heart of Goshen Maryland: Celebrating 300 Years of History by local authors Joanne Atay and Georgianne Michell, is now available from Gateway Press. For e-mail orders or inquiries, please e-mail Joanne Atay at alpuanatay@verizon.net.

Join Rural Montgomery, MoCo Historical Society For a Tour of the Ag Reserve on November 5

In October 1980, Montgomery County adopted [The Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan](#), which carefully outlined the County's goals on land preservation. This policy marked an important component in ensuring the continued viability of agriculture; since that time, 93,000 acres, most of it in the Upcounty, have been preserved for agriculture and open space in Montgomery County, making our program a national model. The plan recognizes that in order to be in the best position to preserve farmland, we as a county must do everything we can to protect the business of farming.

The [Montgomery County Historical Society](#), along with [Celebrate Rural Montgomery](#), is sponsoring a bus tour of the agricultural reserve on **Saturday, November 5, from 9:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.**, traveling with Melanie Choukas-Bradley, author of [Sugarloaf: The Mountain's History, Geology and Natural Lore](#). The cost per person is \$50.00, which includes lunch at the [Comus Inn](#) at the foot of Sugarloaf Mountain. Participants will meet at the historic [Beall-Dawson House](#), 103 W. Montgomery Avenue, Rockville, on Saturday, November 5th – but pre-paid reservations are required by Friday, October 28th. For more information, or to make your reservation, please call (301) 340-2825.

2005 County Farm Directory Now Available

Montgomery County is fortunate to be home to many working farms where residents can purchase fresh, locally-grown produce, meats, flowers, plants and other agricultural commodities. Take advantage of one of the tangible benefits of our county's Agricultural Preserve policy and do some of your shopping at one of nearly 50 farms listed in the 2005 County Farm Directory. Apart from pointing out the best places to buy meat and produce, the directory will also help you locate farms that specialize in eggs, firewood, furniture, sod, hay rides, rabbits, sheep, or, yes, even alpacas.

Directories are provided by the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development's Agricultural Services Division, with the assistance of [Celebrate Rural Montgomery](#), and are available free of charge at the Upcounty Regional Services Center as well as other places in and

around the Upcounty. **But you can print one out right now by [visiting the Rural Montgomery website at www.ruralmontgomery.org/farm_directory.pdf](http://www.ruralmontgomery.org/farm_directory.pdf).**

Go ahead -- visit a local farm and purchase from a local farmer. Continue a tradition as old as Montgomery County itself.

The Open Mike Wants You!

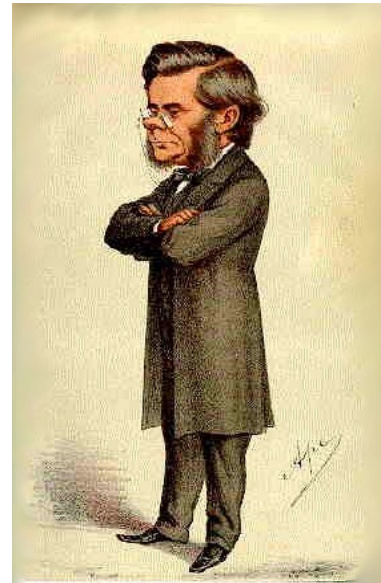
Are you sponsoring an event or having a meeting, and want to invite residents from around the county to participate? Did you or your organization win an award? If you have information you'd like to submit for possible inclusion in an upcoming issue of *The Open Mike*, please e-mail us Brian.Jones@montgomerycountymd.gov and let us know.

The Upcounty Road Scholar

Got a road that needs repairing? A traffic light that's out? Is there a street or intersection that you think needs a stop sign or crosswalk? One of my responsibilities is to make sure someone knows about it -- and to do what I can to get you information on your question or request as quickly as possible.

I stay in regular contact with the [Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation](#) (DPWT) and the [Maryland State Highway Administration](#) (MSHA), and provide each agency with a list of projects that need addressing in the Upcounty. Both agencies receive countless requests each week, and getting a response back can take some time. So bear with me -- if you don't see a particular project listed here, that doesn't necessarily mean it has been forgotten or neglected, but rather that I haven't received an updated report on its progress this month.

With this in mind, the Road Scholar section of the newsletter provides an opportunity to give you the latest information received from DPWT, MSHA, and others on the progress of requests that have been submitted on your behalf. It's also an opportunity for you to [let me know](#) of other projects that may need to be undertaken in your community.



Got a question about roads, sidewalks, or construction in your area? [E-mail the Road Scholar](#) and let us know.

Maryland State Highways Administration Update

Here's the latest information I've received from MSHA, courtesy of MSHA District Engineer Charlie Watkins:

MD 124 at MD 28 and Seneca Highway: Based on comments from drivers, MSHA will be evaluating the timing of the traffic lights on MD 124 where it crosses MD 28 and Seneca Highway to determine whether the lights need to remain green for a longer period of time at certain times of day, including during the morning and evening rush. Evaluations of this type generally take 60 days to complete.

My thanks to District Engineer Charlie Watkins for his prompt attention to this matter.

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Vox Populi

Voices From Around the Upcounty Community

A Note from Mike: I receive countless phone calls, e-mails, and letters each day. Most are passionate, many are frustrated, and a few are downright funny...but all of them are thoughtful and well-intended. I think readers of The Open Mike will be interested to hear what their Upcounty neighbors have to say, whether they're across the street or across the county. With that in mind, the "Vox Pops" section of my newsletter features highlights from some of the correspondence and phone calls I've received in my office over the past month.

"It's time for drastic action. A cap on house prices. New York City has its rent control, why can't we have something akin to that to ensure affordable and decent housing for, among others, the very workers who build the houses. Either that, or a realistic minimum wage, so that the laborer who hauls shingles to the roof of a \$300,000 house (I pick this number because it seems to be the cheapest price on a house in this area) can, when he's done, afford to buy it." -- *Fran*



"I urge the council to maintain the 6,350 units for development at the Shady Grove site as part of the Shady Grove Sector Plan. I further urge the council to allocate 1,500 units to be dedicated to affordable housing. With the desperate need for affordable housing in the county, the proposed reduction to 3,800 units is not adequate to meet the needs of the county." -- *Richard*

"I want the Shady Grove Sector plan to decrease the number of units from 6000+ so there is room for park land and community center and public facilities....I oppose the relocation of the county services facilities and school buses depot on the Webb Tract and request the return of the site to the original light-industrial use." -- *Dana*

"We seem to be up to our old game of adding spending with special appropriations; note the hearing to discuss spending 1.6 million dollars for the Needwood Golf course improvements. Perhaps a surcharge to the golfers that play the course would be more appropriate than taxing the entire population of the county. I am sure there are many other such special wants but can we afford them? Perhaps the users should pay their way here, as well as in places like the Strathmore Theatre. Why should the entire population pay for the entertainment of a few? Raise the price of the admissions to make it self supporting like any other business." -- *Philip*

"We have had poor cable service since April when we upgraded our service for a HDTV. In response to our complaints since April, each outside technician, inside technician, contractor, and line technician who comes out, says that someone else has to come out. Each time we are taking time off from work with no improved service! We are paying the bills, [Comcast] needs to fulfill its part of this agreement by providing service!" -- *Maggie*

"It's wonderful that Verizon's management is engaged in watching the magical digital light come down the optical fiber, but who is watching the store? Who is responsible for intra-Verizon communication? Who is responsible for having things done correctly and in a timely fashion? I hope that you can get Verizon to hire a manager to watch the store while the rest of them are enthralled by the light." -- *Alvin*



"I am a resident of Clarksburg Towne Center and writing to urge you to expedite the construction of roads M-83 and A-305. When Montgomery County facilitated the construction of thousands of new homes they did not provide for concurrent improvements/buildings of the roadway systems. At the present time the few roads that are available are congested and the Montgomery County

traffic overseers do not have an interest in installing new traffic lights and stop signs to even manage the traffic flow." -- Arvin

"I am writing to urge the immediate funding for construction of the A-305 & A-83 roads around Clarksburg. The traffic situation is out of control there and we NEED these roads. This is not an arbitrary want or a frivolous "nice to have," the rate of growth in this area has made the morning commute a bad experience and it is getting worse...Of course, in the absence of the required roads that will ease congestion for us, please pass along my appreciation to the members who wish additional study time for their contribution of "County Alpaca Week." or some other silly business that diverts time and attention to issues that require actual progress and action. By the way, to me a tax-paying voter, a study does NOT qualify as action. Large machines turning soil and packing asphalt would be a start for what qualifies as action." -- Jeff



Join Me At An Open Mike Night In Your Community!

This autumn, I'll be making my annual Open Mike Tour of the Upcounty region to learn more about what matters to you and your neighbors when it comes to your county and community. This is an opportunity for you and your neighbors to bring your concerns, comments, suggestions, complaints, recommendations, you name it, directly to me. I look forward to seeing you!

COMMUNITY	TIME	LOCATION
Olney	Wednesday, October 12 , 2005 7:00 p.m.	Olney Library 3500 Olney-Laytonsville Road, Olney (map)
Germantown	Saturday, October 22 , 2005 10:00 a.m.	BlackRock Center for the Arts 12901 Town Commons Drive, Germantown (map)
Damascus	Wednesday, October 26 , 2005 7:00 p.m.	Damascus Library 9701 Main Street, Damascus (map)

The Usual Disclaimers

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